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# Recreating in Dominguez Canyon Wilderness

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## Introduction

Dominguez Canyon Wilderness, home to the Big and Little Dominguez trails, is an expansive 211,000 acre congressionally-designated wilderness at the heart of the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area. The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for managing the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. We welcome you to your public lands!

## How to Get There

The most common way to access Dominguez Canyon Wilderness is from the Bridgeport Trailhead. Big and Little Dominguez trails begin here. Turn west on Bridgeport Road from US Highway 50, about 20 miles north of Delta, or 22 miles south of Grand Junction, Colorado. For reference, Bridgeport is 7.5 miles north of the Escalante Canyon Road turn off. Follow Bridgeport Road for 3 miles to the trailhead. There is additional parking at the bottom of the hill.

In the spring and fall, this is a very popular hiking and equestrian destination. Parking is limited and often full. Check out the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area travel management map for other trail ideas!

To reach the Wilderness area, follow the road next to the train tracks south for about a mile. **DO NOT WALK ON THE TRAIN TRACKS.** At the stop sign, take a right and cross the tracks carefully. Turn left and continue on the road. You will eventually see two bridges. The first bridge is private property, please be respectful and do not trespass. The second bridge is a BLM bridge. Sign in at the register box, then cross the bridge over the Gunnison River.

## For Everyone's Consideration

### **Modes of Travel**

Trails accessed from Bridgeport Trailhead are open to foot and horse travel only. Motorized and mechanized modes of travel are not allowed. That includes bicycles, strollers, ATVs, and motorcycles.

### **Dogs**

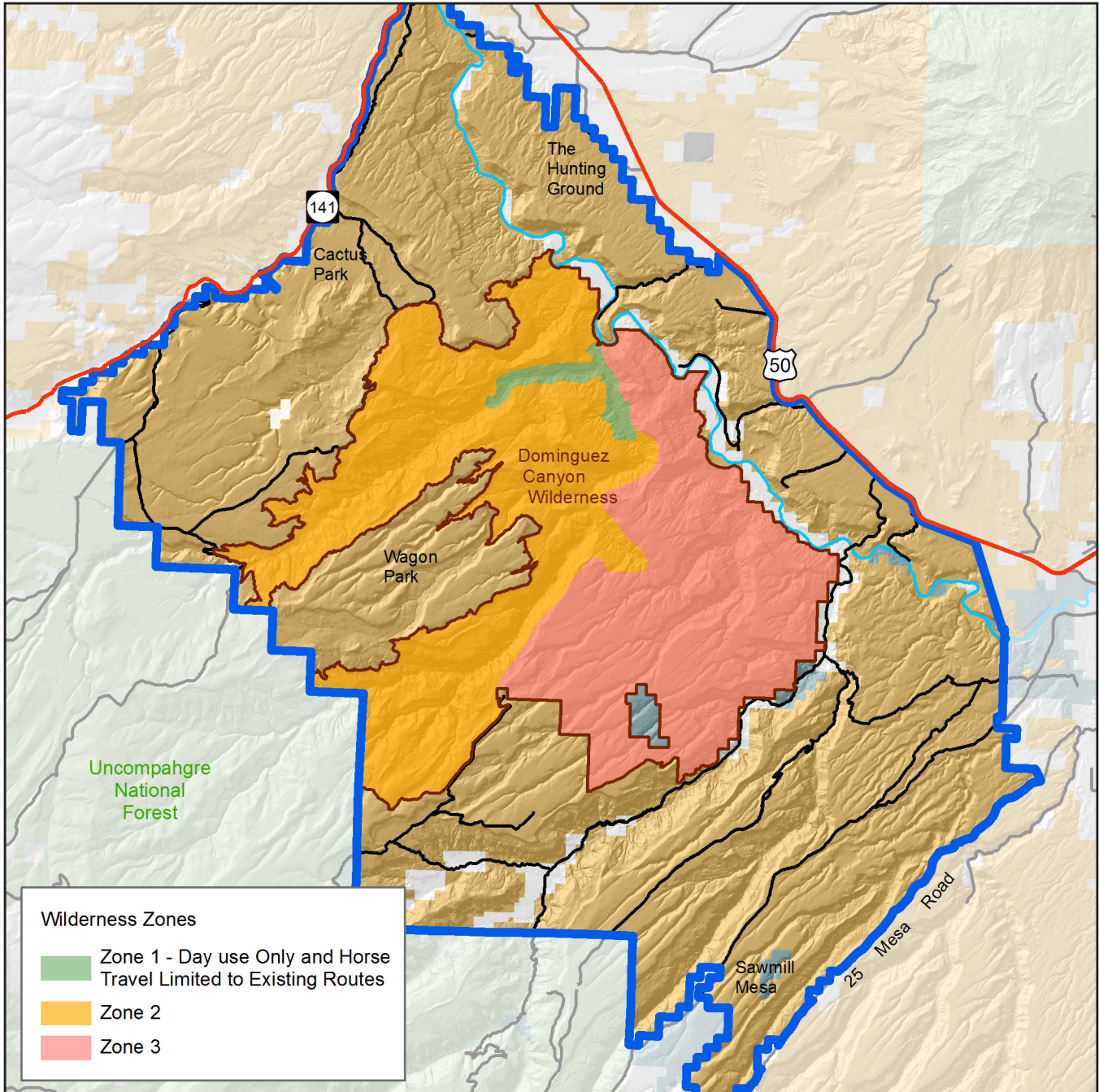
Public lands are a great place to share with your furry friends! To protect the rare bighorn sheep that also live in the canyons, please keep your dogs on leash in the Day Use Zone.



## Wilderness Management Zones

Dominguez Canyon Wilderness contains three management zones all with the over arching goal of preserving, protecting and enhancing the qualities of wilderness.

This map shows the boundaries of each zone:



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## Day Use Zone/Wilderness Zone 1 (Green)

### Camping

- o Camping is not allowed in Zone 1 to protect sensitive resources.

### Boundaries

- o Wooden posts mark the end of the Day Use Zone in each canyon.
- o The georeferenced map referenced below contains the Day Use Zone boundaries.

### Group Size

- o Groups of 25 or fewer are allowed in the Day Use Zone/Wilderness Zone 1 (Green).
- o Groups of 12 or fewer are allowed in Wilderness Zone 2 (Orange) and 3 (Pink).

### Maps

A map and compass are highly recommended. Rescues of lost backpackers have become more common in the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness.

A georeferenced map of the area can be found [here](#). Simply download the map into a compatible app like Avenza onto your phone. You'll be able to see your location on the map, no cellular data needed! Bear in mind that the map may drain your phone battery more quickly and that it should be used as a helpful guide but not be your only means of navigation.

### Outdoor Ethics

When you come to hike or backpack in the canyon, please follow principles of Leave No Trace.

1. Plan Ahead & Prepare: See the recommendations in this guide for maps, water, and waste. Cell service is spotty, especially as you travel further into the wilderness; let people know your plans and bring a satellite communication/location device in case of emergency.
2. Travel & Camp on Durable Surfaces: Follow the existing path and seek out campsites that have been used before. This protects natural resources such as biological soil crust and maintains the characteristics of this landscape that led to a Wilderness designation in the first place.
3. Dispose of Waste Properly: All trash must be packed out. Depending on which wilderness zone you are in, you may also need to pack out human waste (see below). Decide which waste management system is right for you and come prepared.
4. Leave What You Find: There is a long history of human activity in this canyon system and evidence of inhabitation is easy to find. Refrain from touching rock art or collecting items to preserve these cultural and archaeological resources.
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts: As noted below, only dead and downed wood is permitted for fires. Take special care to ensure a campfire is completely out before leaving it. To minimize impact further, opt for a gas stove instead.





Visit With Respect: Dominguez Canyon Wilderness contains numerous petroglyph panels carved by Ute and ancestral Native American people which hold strong cultural and archaeological significance. Never touch rock art or scratch your own designs onto a panel. Avoid building cairns, which can increase impacts on sensitive sites and also detract from the wilderness experience of self-discovery.

6. **Respect Wildlife:** Desert bighorn sheep call these canyons home. Please keep dogs under control to avoid disturbing sheep and their habitat. Observe all wildlife from a distance and never feed animals.
7. **Be Considerate of Other Visitors:** This encompasses all of the other principles, and should be considered throughout the entirety of your visit. Keeping noise levels down, staying on trail, managing waste properly, and respecting cultural sites are key ways to avoid negative effects on the land and the other people enjoying it.

## **Day Adventures**

Big Dominguez Trail follows Big Dominguez Creek through its namesake canyon for approximately 13 miles. Access is from the Bridgeport Trailhead, or from the Gunnison River at the mouth of Big Dominguez Canyon. The trail can also be access from the upper trailhead at Dominguez Campground. Dominguez Campground is located approximately 10 miles from CO Highway 141.

Little Dominguez Trail is accessed via Bridgeport Trailhead. Visitors will hike the main trail from Bridgeport for approximately 2.5 miles, to the confluence of Big and Little Dominguez Canyons. At this point, Little Dominguez Canyon is on the left (south). Look for an old road with the marker 36. The trail is not well-defined so use the canyon walls as your side boards. The trail follows Little Dominguez Creek through the entire length of the canyon, but does become primitive at times with dense vegetation and it is frequently blocked by beaver ponds.

## **Overnight Use**

Dominguez Canyon Wilderness offers countless opportunities for extended backpacking adventures. Traveling off existing routes requires advanced navigation skills and proficiency with map and compass, and/or GPS. Be aware that the terrain can quickly become steep, rough, and disorienting. Summer temperatures can exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Plan your trip accordingly and follow the principles of Leave No Trace.

### **Drinking Water**

Big and Little Dominguez Creeks are the main sources of water for overnight visitors. This water must be filtered. Water is seasonal and may be nonexistent or scarce in dry years.



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## Human Waste

Human waste in high use desert ecosystems can contribute to water quality issues and other negative resource impacts.

In Wilderness Zone 2, all overnight visitors must pack out solid human waste.

In Wilderness Zone 3, all overnight visitors must bury solid human waste in a cathole more than 100 meters from natural water sources.

## Camps

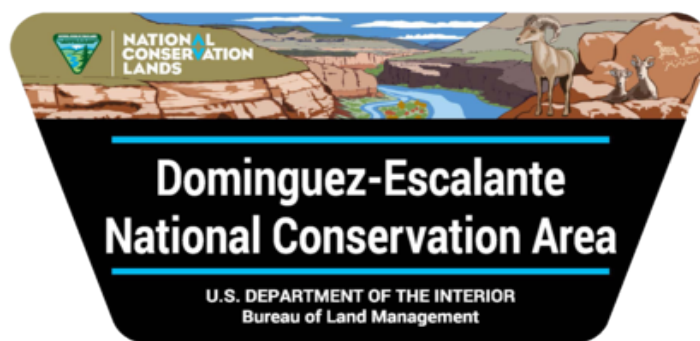
There are no designated campsites in the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. Make sure to lessen the impact of your camp by following the Outdoor Ethics listed above.

Camping in the Day Use Zone is not allowed.

Campsites along the Gunnison River at the mouth of Dominguez Canyon are closed to non-boating overnight camping from May 1 through Labor Day weekend.

## Campfires

Campfires are allowed using dead and downed wood. Protect the fragile desert environment and do not cut live trees. Consider using a gas stove to minimize your impact on the ecosystem. If you do have a campfire, make sure it is DEAD OUT before leaving it. All visitors camping along the Gunnison River must contain all wood fires in a fire pan.



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